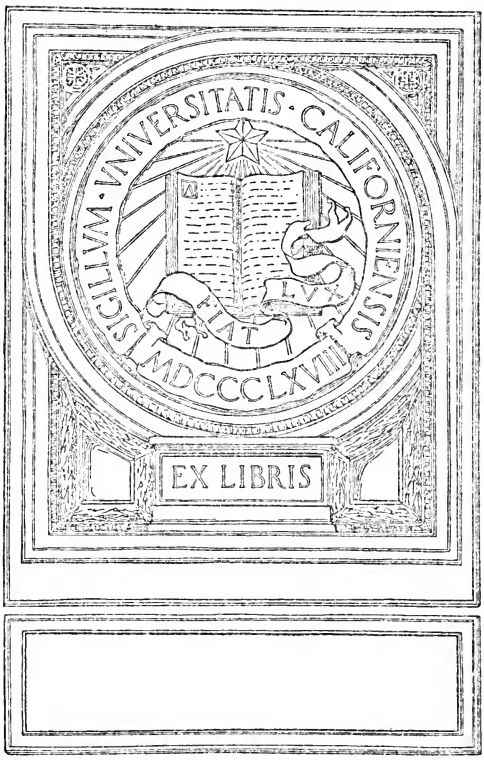
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HOW DO WE PROCURE SUGAR?

A QUESTION

PROPOSED

FOR THE CONSIDERATION

OF

THE PEOPLE

OF

GREAT BRITAIN.

BY A NAVAL OFFICER.

WHITBY:
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1828

THE following Address was drawn up by an Officer of rank in the Navy, who was recently employed in one of our Slave Colonies; and, in laying it before the public, the Committee of the Whitby Anti-Slavery Society consider it necessary to say, that they believe the facts contained in it to be established by the most authentic testimony, that they fully concur in the inferences drawn from them, and cordially assent to the several Propositions suggested.

The Committee cannot refrain from expressing their earnest wish, that this appeal may be read with the attention which the subject deserves; and that all who value the privileges of Christianity, and the blessings of freedom, may be induced to exert themselves for the extinction of slavery, which the Planters and Slave Owners are making such strenuous efforts to perpetuate.

HOW DO WE PROCURE SUGAR?

"WHAT does your Sugar cost?" is the title of a little Tract, designed, by enlisting the feelings on the side of humanity, and by arousing the sympathies of our common nature, to awaken the people of this country to a sense of what is individually required of them, by the force of the precept, "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you," on behalf of the suffering Slave Population of our Sugar Colonies. In support of the same cause, I desire to appeal, not only to the heart, but to the head: bear with me then, my friends, while I lay the matter plainly before you.

We procure sugar by the labour of Slaves. About four years ago, the Government, urged by the numerous petitions presented to Parliament, and pressed by the specific motion proposed in the House of Commons, by Mr. Buxton, made known to the respective legislatures of the Slave Colonies, the expectation of the Parliament and people of Great Britain, that certain specific measures, which were detailed, should be adopted for the amelioration of the slaves, and for the gradual extinction of slavery. What has been the result?—Rejection of the measures, and denial of the right of Parliament to interfere! What then remains for us to do? Let every one answer for himself, when he has read what follows.

The proposition, that slave labour is more expensive than that of freemen, has been denied; but it is now fully established by experiment and facts. 'Surely, then,' some one may exclaim, 'the interest of the owner will induce him to adopt the measures which shall convert his slave into a freeman.' So thought the men who procured the abolition of the Slave Trade; but they were deceived. If a bounty were paid upon goods manufactured by the worst kind of machinery, of equal amount to the difference of cost between them and the goods produced by the best machine, would there be any inducement to the adoption of the latter? Now, there is such a bounty upon slave labour, by the drawback paid upon the refined sugar exported, exceeding the duty upon its importation in the raw state; an excess which raises the price of all sugars in the market, 3*s*. the cwt.; and gives, therefore, to the sugar grower a higher profit than he would otherwise obtain. Consequently, he can afford to be wasteful in the mode of producing his crop; and he *will* be wasteful; for it is low profit which induces thrift. The quantity of sugar imported from our slave colonies is about 40 times greater than that which comes from India, which is the produce of freemen; and a duty of 10*s*. the cwt. is laid upon the latter, more than upon the former, of similar quality. Although, therefore, the sugar of India receives the benefit of the bounty in its increased price, when sold in the home market; yet the extra duty it has to pay, makes it more profitable if exported. Hence, there would be

little of this sugar sold here, if it were not that many families use it for conscience sake, as being one of the means whereby slavery is to be extinguished. Thus it is, by the bounty and discriminating duty on sugar, giving a monopoly of the market to that which is produced by slaves, that the ruinous system of slave labour is upheld; and the people of this country are compelled to pay more than they otherwise need do, for an article of such general use as sugar; whereby they are actually fostering and encouraging the state of things against which they have protested.

The slaves in our West India colonies amount to about 720,000; and perhaps there are between 60 and 80,000 more in the Island of Mauritius. In the former, the number has decreased between the years 1818 and 1824, at the average of about 4700 per annum, by deaths exceeding births; and at the average of about 1300 per annum, by manumissions. In the latter, the decrease would appear to have been at the rate of seven per cent. per annum, between the years 1819 and 1822. But as this destruction of life is so enormous, the manumissions being few, it is hoped there may be some mistake in the official returns. I would now ask, Do we any where on the earth, find a people whose numbers are annually dwindling away, except where they are the victims of oppression? When moderately fed, adequately clothed, and not overworked, men every where increase and multiply. The promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, which prevails in savage life, does not prevent them from maintaining their numbers. The conclusion, then, is inevitable, that our slaves are not sufficiently fed and clothed, and are too hard worked. It is in vain that the advocates of slavery assert the contrary; so powerful a law of nature cannot be counteracted by any less powerful or less general causes.

In some islands, each slave has a piece of ground, from which he is to raise his food; in others, the ground is wrought by gangs, for the benefit of the whole. Under both systems, a small quantity of food is provided by the owner, as well as some clothing. The food and clothing thus supplied are generally totally inadequate to the wants of the slave; and the time allowed for the cultivation of the provision grounds is not sufficient to supply the deficiency. This time varies in the different islands, from 26 to 35 days in the year, exclusive of Sunday; but in the colony of Honduras, the slave is allowed one day in the week throughout the year, besides Sunday.

Can it be doubted, that the most effectual way to benefit the *slave*, is that which shall diminish the demand for the produce of his labour. If, instead of importing 200,000 tons of sugar from the West Indies, we procured one-half from India, at an equal duty, the price would fall, profits would fall, some of the land now growing sugar would not be wanted; and the planter would exert his ingenuity in devising the means of diminishing the cost of cultivation, as well as the expense of maintaining his slaves. He would, therefore, introduce machinery; the plough instead of the hoe: he would substitute cattle for men. He might require, perhaps, half the number of slaves; but as the other half must be supported, he

would continue to employ the whole, who would, therefore, have less to do than before. He would find it cheaper to discontinue the food and clothing hitherto supplied, and to give them more land, and more time to cultivate it; from which they would raise sufficient food and clothing, and be enabled to lay by a surplus for the purchase of their freedom.

Sunday, which the Almighty has hallowed as his sabbath, would not, as now, be employed, either in going to and from market, or in labour and toil. Time that is of little value is easily given up; the day would, therefore, be devoted to religious instruction and religious duties. Hitherto little progress has been made in educating slaves, and no wonder; before the mind can be cultivated, the body must have repose. So long as men continue in a state of physical suffering, labouring without the reward of their toil, so long will they remain in a state of moral debasement; and the attempt to enlighten their understandings will be futile: education and emancipation must go hand in hand.

But it may be asked, what security we can have, that the slaves will thus employ the time given up to them? The best of all,—that which is of greater force and equal certainty with animal sagacity,—the desire of man to better his condition, when a reasonable prospect of doing so is afforded him. The free black and coloured people amount to above 90,000, in the West India colonies. They propagate almost as rapidly as man does any where; and few, very few, instances occur of their requiring relief. And how did these people procure their freedom? By voluntary toil; by which also they are rapidly increasing in numbers and in wealth.

A few years ago, it was maintained by the advocates of 'things as they are,' that the negro was of a different species from the white man; that he belonged to a lower race of beings. The idea was monstrous; but doctrines as monstrous have been promulgated and received. Now it is urged, that the slave is not impelled by the same motives, nor susceptible of the same incentives, as the free man; and hence the conclusion is arrived at, that he who was born a slave, must continue in slavery. God has decreed respecting man, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread;" but reason and nature, following that decree, demand that he shall be allowed to *eat* the bread he has earned by the sweat of his brow. Place the slave, then, in the condition to do this; and man as he is, he will act as man.

At the same time that the advocates of slavery proclaim the incurable indolence of the negro, from which he can be roused by no other stimulus than the lash, they tell us, that the slaves abound in superfluities and luxuries, acquired by their voluntary labour on their provision grounds; and they fear not to assert, that the comfort and happiness they enjoy is superior to that of the peasantry of England. The terms, comfort and happiness, thus employed, contain the bitterest irony. It were folly to combat such arguments, if the pertinacity with which they are reiterated, had not induced those to assent to them, who will not think for themselves.

It is scarcely possible for any slave, now employed in field labour, to raise a sufficient sum to purchase his freedom. Those who are artificers may; and accordingly we find very large sums given, by this description of slaves, for their freedom, or that of their children; amounting, in some instances, to three times the market price of a slave. The calculation of the price of manumission is the amount of the capital, which, at the usual rate of interest, would give a return equal to that annual sum for which the slave could be let out at hire. For instance, if the market rate of interest be six per cent, and if an artisan slave would produce to his owner £15 per annum, his price would be calculated to be £250. The unfairness of such a mode of valuation is apparent; for the market price must always be the real value; which will consist of the capital, from which is to flow the ordinary rate of interest, together with such further sum as shall replace the price in the average duration of the life of the slave. Thus, if the earnings of a slave be £15 per annum, and the period of his health and strength be about eight years, his price should be about £85, the rate of interest being six per cent. It appears, by official records, that the market price of slaves varies between £17 and £90, in the different colonies.

I now return to the question, 'What are we to do?' To which I reply:—

1. Let us petition Parliament to withdraw the bounty on exported sugar, and to equalize the duty on all produce from the East and West Indies.

2. Let us petition Parliament to pass a law, that Sunday markets shall be abolished in all our slave colonies, and another day substituted; and further, that time equivalent to one day in the week throughout the year, may be given to the slaves, besides the market day, and exclusive of Sunday.

3. Let us petition Parliament, that the slave owner may be compelled, by law, to enfranchise his slave, on receiving a tender of his market price.

4. Until these things are done, let us abstain from the use of all West India and Mauritius produce, and purchase the sugar, coffee, &c. of India instead.

Need I enumerate the advantages which would flow from the adoption of the first proposition? The public would buy their sugar considerably cheaper; coffee, rum, &c. would also fall in price; while the export of our manufactures to India might be increased to an indefinite amount. West India produce having no longer the monopoly of the home market, necessity, the mother of invention, would force upon the slave owner the adoption of measures to diminish the expense of raising his produce; and I have shewn that these would consist with the welfare of the slaves; who, under more favourable treatment, would lose the habits and propensities that now degrade them, and would gain somewhat of the characteristics of freemen.

As, however, the best mode of management is not immediately found out, the adoption of the second proposition would make sure of the

matter; while the adoption of the third, would secure to the slave the benefit of his exertions. But as we have not the present means of enforcing these measures, and as unfortunately they may be long delayed, I would urge the instant adoption of the fourth proposition, which every one has in his own power. I urge it upon the score of religious principle, of humanity, of policy, of self-interest; and I feel persuaded, that I shall not appeal in vain. Ignorance of the actual state of things has been the cause of slavery having been so long suffered to exist; that ignorance removed, he is without excuse who shall connive at its continuance. There is only one point, upon which a conscientious man may withhold his concurrence, and that is, the consideration that these measures may ruin the slave owners. On this head, it is important to bear in mind, that they will be ruined under their present system. At the present rate of decrease, the day will soon arrive, when the number of slaves will be insufficient to cultivate the land now cultivated; the productiveness of which is every year diminishing.

A man can keep himself cheaper than he can be kept by any body else; and when men are multiplied, the competition of numbers increases the productiveness of the labourer, in a greater ratio than the cost of his maintenance increases; but this competition cannot take place under a system of slave labour.

In the progress of mankind from savage life, by cultivation and commerce, to the state of civilized society, we find that land is plentiful and cheap, because men are scarce and dear; and land is scarce and dear, when men are plentiful. In the natural state of society, then, it is manifestly to the interest of the owner of land, that population should increase, and that the labourers should be freemen; for it is only under a system of free labour, that the difference between the productiveness of labour and the cost of maintenance will be the greatest.

To those who, adopting these views, shall be desirous of assisting in their execution, it will afford satisfaction to see how soon they may effect the extinction of slavery. In the colony of Honduras, which has about 2400 slaves, Saturday and Sunday are given up to the slave, which is from one-fourth to one-fifth more time than he has in any other colony; and here the manumissions proceed at the rate of about one per cent per annum, which is one-third faster than the rate in any other colony, twenty times faster than the rate in two of them, and more than three times as fast as the aggregate rate in the West Indies collectively. These two days are, however, only half the time the slave ought to have; for Sunday is one of them, and it is the market day; but if he had double the time, we may infer that the rate of manumissions would be doubled. Moreover, in this colony, the price of a slave when purchasing his freedom, is more than three times the market price; we may therefore infer, that if the law compelled his manumission at the market price, the manumissions would increase threefold. On both these accounts, we may assume, that if the proposed measures were adopted, the number of slaves who would annually purchase

their freedom would be increased fivefold; a rate of increase which, if the population remained stationary, would extinguish slavery in twenty years; but as the improved condition, arising from more food and clothing and less work, would occasion an increase of the slave population, by the natural process, which we will assume at the rate at which the enfranchised blacks increase, viz. two per cent. per annum; we must calculate the effect of the manumissions in reducing the number of slaves at three per cent. per annum, which would free the whole race in little more than thirty-three years. This may indeed seem to many a very long period; but if effectual encouragement were given to marriage among the slaves; if their religious instruction were systematically and generally provided for; if the separation of families for sale were peremptorily prohibited, under all circumstances; if the property of slaves were legally secured to them, as well as the power of disposing of it as they please; if the evidence of slaves were received, quantum valeat, in courts of law; I have no doubt, but the period of the extinction of slavery would be brought much nearer: for, as the number of freemen increased, the value of slaves would decrease, and manumissions would proceed in an increasing ratio.

Now, when will slavery cease in our colonies, if things are allowed to go on as they have since the abolition of the slave trade? The average rate of manumissions is about one in four to five hundred per annum; the average rate of decrease, by deaths exceeding births, is about one in two hundred per annum, excluding Mauritius. These two causes will clear off the slave population in 120 years: and who is the principal performer in this process of emancipation?—Death! And does death make compensation for the victims he releases?—No; but the people of England do for him! What is the value of 4700 slaves, at £50 a head?—£235,000. What is the amount of extra profit to the planters, arising from the increase of 3s per cwt. to the price of sugar by the bounty?—About £500,000. Alas, the slave owner would be remunerated, if death's victims were twofold.—Death's victims, do I say?—they are the victims offered upon the altar of Mammon; that altar which the rulers of England erected in days gone by, and which the people of England have laboured to support. "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers."

Countrymen and friends, if these things be so, what remains for us to do? Have such passages as the following no meaning at the present day? or were they "written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come?" "There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel." "And he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed."—"And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" "For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy." "Therefore all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them."

But let us examine the question of compensation to the planters more narrowly. When a slave is enabled to purchase his freedom, a jury must assess his value; and that value will always be found in his market price, whatever it be, now and at all future time, as long as it is worth a planter's while to buy slaves. On this portion of his property the slave owner will, therefore, receive full compensation, by the third proposition.

What compensation, then, is he to receive for the loss occasioned by the lessened demand for sugar, consequent upon the execution of the first proposition? None;—because whether he raised sugar by freemen or by slaves, that measure ought to be adopted as one of sound general policy, which looks to the interest of the consumers, and not of the producers of a commodity. Now, it is the interest of the latter to sell as dear, and of the former to buy as cheap, as they can: and the competition of producers is the best and the only security for the consumers. But this competition, the discriminating duties prevent. Who ever heard of compensation being given to the manufacturer, who, working with a clumsy machine, has his labour superseded and his profits brought to nought, by the contrivance of a better apparatus? What compensation did copyists receive when printing was invented? Need I strive to enumerate the almost *innumerable* similar cases which have occurred in our own day, which are continually occurring, and which must go on as long as the world lasts? Is the progress of society to be arrested, and are the laws of nature to be reversed, for the sake of the planters? The first proposition, which is good in principle, and expedient in practice, is only the more strengthened by its being the most powerful means of gradually abolishing slavery.

Let us see what will be the probable effect of the proposed measures upon the value of land, compared with the certain effect of things being allowed to go on at their present rate. In 120 years, no slaves will be in existence in our West India colonies; the 90,000 free, black, and coloured people will have increased to 306,000; and their number will have been further increased by the annual manumissions to 462,000 free men. This will comprise the whole labouring population of the colonies.

Now, what would the population amount to in 33 years, under the state of things which we suppose to follow the adoption of the proposed measures? The 720,000 slaves, increasing at the rate of two per cent. per annum, would in this period amount to 1,195,200; and they would all be free men; to which is to be added, the increase of the 90,000 free blacks in the same period; and we have a population of 1,344,600 free labourers; and in 87 years more, they would amount to 3,684,204.

According to the principle before laid down, under which of the circumstances as to population, at the end either of 33 or 120 years, would land be of the most value? The every-day experience of every man, suffices to shew, that when labourers are numerous, the wages of labour are low; and the experience of ages shews, that as population increases, land rises in value. It is,

therefore, clear, that with the greater population, the cultivation of the colonies would be carried on cheaper; that the quantity of produce would be greater; and that the land would be of higher value. But with the smaller population, it is very doubtful, if sugar would be cultivated at all, and certainly not to the same extent as now; the wages of labour would be high, and the value of land low; the 477,500 free men would be chiefly small proprietors, whom no wages would tempt to labour for another, or artificers whom nothing would tempt to till the earth; the cultivation of the soil would be principally for the purpose of raising food for its own population; and there would be few exports. Who does not see in this latter picture, the ruin of the planters; or in the former, their prosperity?

Should there be no compensation, then, for the time the slave-owner is compelled, by the second proposition, to give up to his slave? Yes, if the giving up that time causes a loss of property; which would be the case, if under a free competition with free men, the slaves should not produce as much of sugar, or any other commodities, as there is a demand for. When the planter shall prove, that he could sell more sugar at a profit, if he could produce more; and that the want of the time given up to the slave is the sole cause of his not producing more, he will then be entitled to compensation.

For example, suppose that the effect of the first proposition should reduce the demand for West India Sugar, one fourth, but that the effect of the second proposition should diminish the quantity produced one third, we should have to make up to the planters the value of the difference, or one twelfth.

I am persuaded, however, that the slaves would, under their improved condition, and with brighter prospects before them, produce as much for their masters in four days, as they now do in six; they would at least produce as much as their masters would find a profit in the sale of. On this head, it is important to observe, that by the laws of one of the Islands (St. Lucie) it is provided, that if a master shall allow his slave two days in the week out of crop, and a day and a half in crop, exclusive of Sunday, he need not give him any food; the slaves are moreover to be supplied with two shirts and two pair of trowsers for each male, and two shifts and two petticoats for each female, annually.

Now this proves, that the time named in the second proposition, is not more than equivalent to the food and clothing which the planters themselves consider the slaves ought to have.

Reader, I turn to thee. What is thy duty in this matter? Recollect, that every particle of slave-produce consumed rivets more strongly the fetters of the slave, binds him more firmly in that thraldom, which precludes his exercising the attributes of man, and keeps him in a state of ignorance of, and alienation from, God. Do you profess yourself a Christian? Does no monitor stir within you? Listen to the suggestions of conscience; approve yourself in the sight of all men the follower of him who came "to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening

of the prison to them that are bound;" who, enjoining his apostles freely to give, because freely they had received, requires of us also to be strenuous in assisting all men to procure those blessings which we ourselves enjoy.

Are you among the legislators of your country? Remember that you exercise this trust for the benefit of mankind, and to the glory of God. Beware how you obstruct the efficacy of the prayer which ascends weekly from the congregations of our church, petitioning the throne of grace, that you may be endued "with grace, wisdom, and understanding." Have your opinions on this subject been taken from others? Deal fairly now with the evidence laid before you; follow the convictions of your reason; act upon your own judgment; do your part in causing "the provisions of the law to accord with the principles of nature." The question you have to decide, is not as to the greater or less degree of comfort and happiness the slaves are to enjoy, but whether they are to live or to die;—"therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."

Is your lot cast in the humbler walks of life? Take heed that you "follow not a multitude to do evil." It will be no excuse, when you stand before the judgment-seat of God, that you did only as others did. They, perhaps, are, as you were, ignorant of the condition of the slaves; but now, that you are instructed in the means of doing your duty, flinch not from it. Look around you, and count the blessings you possess, in the security of life and property, in the free exercise of your own will, in the communion and sympathy of your friends, in the endearments of home. By all you hold dear in this life, or hope for in the next, I adjure you to stand forth, the uncompromising champion of the wretched slaves. The voice of wisdom shall ascend from the public meeting to the Parliament house; though only uttered by few, it will, as the still small voice of conscience, overpower the cry of ignorance, prejudice, avarice, and passion; and slavery, that foul and festering sore in our constitution, that blot on the page of our history, that stain on our name and nation, shall vanish before the breath of truth, as the earth shall melt away at the blast of the trump that shall summon to judgment all the kindreds of the earth.

M.

*** For further information on this subject, see "Stephen on West India Slavery;" "Adam Hodgson's letter to Say, on free and slave labour;" "Review of the Slave Trade and Slavery, published at Birmingham, 1827;" "Relief for West Indian Distress, by James Cropper;" "Support of Slavery investigated, by ditto;" "Annual Reports and Monthly Reporters of the Anti-Slavery Society."